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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study focused primarily on career women, managing learning, and the application of lifelong learning concepts. The main purpose of the study was to discover how lifelong learning concepts may have been instrumental in influencing the vision, attitude, and goals of the 20 career women included in this inquiry (two women were interviewed in person, while 18 women completed a survey). Further, learner-managed learning, motivational theories, and reading reviews have been included in the study to establish a framework from which to identify the lifelong learner. This study identified the importance of promoting lifelong learning in society. Sample survey is attached. (Contains 18 references and 1 table.) (Author/BT)

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Career Women: Managing Learning and Overcoming Obstacles Through Lifelong Learning Concepts

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ABSTRACT

Career Women: Managing Learning and Overcoming Obstacles Through Lifelong Learning Concepts

This qualitative study focused primarily on career women, managing learning, and the application of lifelong learning concepts. The main purpose of the study was to discover how lifelong learning concepts may have been instrumental in influencing the vision, attitude, and goals of the twenty career women included in this inquiry. The data were collected by using a face-to-face interview setting and surveys. This study identified the importance of promoting lifelong learning in our society.

Career Women: Managing Learning and Overcoming Obstacles Through Lifelong Learning Concepts

Introduction

"Learning is a lifelong adventure, and anyone with the motivation and a vision for the future will savor the expedition."

The idea that lifelong learning is a nebulous concept has long since surpassed any such connotation. Today, lifelong learning concepts have become a very influential part of the educational community, as well as the business community.

This study was a systematic inquiry that focused primarily on career women. The purpose of the inquiry was to discover how lifelong learning concepts were instrumental in influencing the vision, attitude, and goals of the career women included in this study, and in addition, to identify studies that give validity to the importance of promoting lifelong learning in our society. Further, learner-managed learning, motivational theories, and reading reviews have been included in the study to establish a framework from which to identify the lifelong learner. This inquiry also explored the influence of lifelong learning on the health and well-being of a focused group of females involved in a longitudinal study. Qualitative methodology (Berg, 1995) was used to conduct the study, and during the inquiry twenty career women, from the educational field and other professional jobs, conversed about their learning experiences and what influenced them to become lifelong learners. The data were collected by using two methods: face-to-face interviews and surveys. This information was deemed significant in order to provide data that may be helpful to other career women in their endeavor to reach their achievement pinnacle. Further, this study was unique in that it was limited to career women, and it has the potential to add new knowledge to the literature in the area of professional working women and the influence of lifelong learning concepts on their lives as they work to overcome

obstacles, gain new knowledge, improve job performance, understand themselves, others, and the world around them.

Research Question

The research question was as follows:

> How did lifelong learning concepts influence the lives of several career women, and what criteria was evinced to identify the females as lifelong learners?

Literature Review

A brief overview of the literature has been included to establish the current state of knowledge in the selected subject area.

Career Women

Women have overcome many obstacles to become career directed professionals with a passion for learning. Rimm (2001), in her book entitled **How Jane Won: 55 successful women share how they grew from ordinary girls to extraordinary women**, reported that the successful women in her survey had overcome many obstacles. She added that they had struggled with poverty, health problems, racial and religious issues, economic prejudice, and learning difficulties. In addition, she stated, "Our successful women struggled and sacrificed to balance the roles of mother, wife, and professional" (Rimm, 2001, p. 18). Friedan (1981) noted that women, in their compulsion and challenge of their new career choices and the other choice of motherhood, were hit with an agonizing indecision. She stated:

> Yes, they have more choices---and those very choices may seem like a burden. But they already know that they are strong enough to risk pain, loneliness, rejection; to risk not being perfect---and to risk mistakes. Well, they've had to, learning to be a doctor, lawyer, business person, to do their work. (Friedan, 1981, p. 340)

Friedan (1981) also emphasized, while speaking to an extraordinary gathering of

leaders, the need for daughters and sons hold to the dream of equality in the years ahead in order to save the dream of American freedom. These are only a few of the obstacles that career women have been confronted with.

Lifelong Learner

Adult learning, sometimes referred to as andragogy, sets the stage for recounting the history of lifelong learning. Early adult learning dates back many years, perhaps with the great philosophers. The ideal of education as a lifelong process was put forward centuries ago by the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle. Plato and Aristotle envisioned that an adult would devote himself throughout his life to what they called the "pursuits of leisure, the endeavor to gain for himself every greater understanding of himself, society, and the world (Compton, 1983).

According to Gross (1977), a lifelong learner (free learner) is a person who is liberated from the superstitions about education. He or she is a self-teacher and comes from an elite group of individuals with a special talent, intelligence, and drive.

Lifelong Learning and Health: The Nun Study

The Nun Study is a landmark study which supports the theory that continuous learning and early linguistic performance may halt the presence of Alzheimer's disease in late life. One hundred nuns from the School, Sisters of Notre Dame religious congregation, took part in this long-term study designed to measure cognitive ability of young adults through their writing of autobiographies at the early age of 22. Some 58 years after they had written their autobiographies, the nuns took part in tests of cognitive abilities. The complexity of the nuns' writing styles was correlated with their risk of developing Alzheimer's disease (AD) late in life.

> Of the nuns who died, 90 percent of those with Alzheimer's disease confirmed at autopsy had low linguistic ability in early life, compared with only 13 percent in those without evidence of the disease. (JAMA, Feb. 21, 1996)

Snowdon (1996), of the University of Kentucky's Sanders-Brown Center on Aging and lead author of the report, believed that full development of the brain and cognitive abilities early in life, through education or other stimulation may protect people from Alzheimer's disease and cognitive problems later on in adult life.

Other studies have been aligned with Snowdon's. For instance, scientists at the Rush Alzheimer's Disease Center and Rush-Presbyterian-St. Luke's Medical Center in Chicago, Illinois in a "Use It Or Lose It?' study suggests mentally stimulating activities may reduce Alzheimer's risk. "The research looked at everyday activities like reading books, newspapers or magazines, engaging in crosswords or card games" (JAMA, Feb. 13, 2002).

Learner-Managed Learning

The process of learning should continue throughout an individual's life, whether or not the person is involved with the formal educational system. It recognizes that much of the learning people do will take place outside of any formal or recognized educational system. Basically, what lifelong learning seeks to do is to provide a framework within which an individual can reflect on the past and prepare for the future in terms of learning experiences (Long, 1984). Gross (1977) stated that it would be impractical to ask all students to leave colleges or universities and self-direct their own learning for specific jobs. Many students need a set pattern, or what one would call "ordered learning," in order to succeed. Adler (1985) emphasized that basic schooling must be conceived as preparation for continued learning throughout the years of one's life.

Worell and Nelson (1974) believed that the educator should become a facilitator of the learning process. This method would allow the learner to learn important skills through a self-reinforcement system. As a result, the learner develops the capability required for self-control. At this point, the learner gradually moves away from external

control processes towards internalized control. This process is a key factor in the maintenance of learner-managed learning and a very important segment of lifelong learning.

Motivational Theories

As previously stated, lifelong learning is self-directed, and one must take responsibility for his or her own learning by using motivational factors. Motivational theories prevail throughout the literature. However, whether the writings on motivation were introduced by Glasser (1990), Long (1997), McCarthy (1996), or Maslow (1970), it becomes very evident that a consistent theme throughout is that motivation comes from within a person, and in order to be a lifelong learner, one must be motivated.

Long (1997) believed that many external and internal forces provide the drive to motivate individuals, and each individual channels this drive according to his or her needs at a particular time. These external forces may be in the form of rewards and punishments. Glasser (1990), in his "Control Theory" about how people learn, held that behavior is never caused by response to outside stimuli, but by what people want most at the time. These wants could be in the form of basic needs: survival, love, power, and freedom.

Maslow (1970), in his book Motivation and Personality, likewise directed his theory toward the physiological drives, one's basic needs. These needs are safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, aesthetic needs, and the need for self-actualization. The holistic-dynamic theory, as Maslow refers to it, contains concepts which state that humans must meet certain needs in order to maintain a motivational state. His self-actualization theory may well define the motivational needs of the lifelong learner. After all other basic needs have been fulfilled, the need to do what one is suited to do prevails. That may be the act of developing a latent talent or the continuation of a basic need. Self-actualizing people appreciate developing their

talents, and they are propelled by growth motivation. That is, they are dependent for their own development and continued growth on their own potentialities and latent resources (Maslow, 1970).

Maslow's theory (1970) has also drawn heavily on the developmentalists' philosophy. The developmentalist are fundamentally interested in how children grow and learn on their own. These children could be referred to as independent or free learners. Therefore, one could conclude that Maslow's self-actualizing person has inner motivation which may have been developed from an early age. If this is true, then one would also have to conclude that external forces helped to create the inner drive for one to learn on his or her own at such an early age.

Jean Piaget (1952), a biologist and psychologist, theorized that during all development stages, the child experiences his or her environment, using whatever mental maps have been constructed to that point. If the experience is a repeated one, it fits easily or is assimilated into the structure. If Piaget's developmental theory is correct, as the child develops along the four developmental stages, adequate cognitive structures must be built at each stage along the way if, in one's view, the inner drive to learn will become a lifelong experience.

McCarthy's (1996) theory emphasized that it is important to respect one's "learning style" if he or she would have a fervent desire to continue learning throughout life. "Learning styles" play an important part on the way an individual learns and how long that individual will have the desire to learn. She suggested that one's learning style has its roots in the discipline of psychology and the classification of psychological types. This conclusion is based on research demonstrating that, as the result of heredity, upbringing, and current environmental demands, different individuals have a tendency to take in information in different ways and process the information in different ways. The classifications are as follows: concrete perceivers, abstract

perceivers, active processors, and reflective processors. The implications for instruction is that the curriculum design should be one which connects with all learning styles. The foregoing theories produce the assumption that motivation is constant, complex, and universal.

Lifelong Learners as Motivated Readers

Lifelong learners are motivated readers. Who are the motivated readers that would be lifelong learners? How did they become motivated readers, and what does the research reveal? As a point of reference, a motivated reader may be a metaphor for a lifelong learner. They both may be described as being self-directed and constantly striving to discover new knowledge. They read not only to gain knowledge and to improve their job performance but also for personal enrichment.

Literacy refers to the act of being literate, the ability to read and write. Further, reading effectively is the foundation for learning, and it should begin during early childhood. Allen (1995), in her book, It's never too late: Leading adolescents to lifelong literacy, stated that reading must be done frequently. She noted also that a literacy rich environment celebrates reading and writing and depicts literacy as something to be cherished. In her book, Raising Lifelong Learners: A parent's guide, Calkins (1997) listed several steps that parents should take to help their children to become lifelong learners. Some of those steps are as follows: create a literate environment in the home that supports reading, encourage children to want to read, read aloud to share and nurture a love of reading, have a variety of books in the home, teach the art of conversation throughout the children's lives, and encourage children to talk about books.

Henderson (2001) reported on an interview with a participant about reading. The participant stated:

> I just want to say how much I believe that learning is

> lifelong, and I try to instill this in my children and into my grandchildren...I know the key to anything is being able to read well and understand what you read and have a love for that. (p.94)

Another participant that was interviewed during the same study stated that she started reading at an early age, she began to write stories, read books over and over again, and was accepted into the gifted program at 7 years of age. The results of the interviews indicated that reading for achievement was a very important part of the participant's daily activities during early childhood.

Social Learning Theory

Social psychologists now know that socialization continues throughout people's life span, as long as people continue to learn from social experiences. Socialization is the process of social learning when people interact with others. Some people have the greatest number of social learning experiences in childhood, and others tend to have important socialization experiences all through life. Modern life-styles tend to encourage lifelong learning and lifelong socialization (http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/).

Methodology

Qualitative methodology was used to identify and collect data from twenty participants. For two of the participants, the data were collected in a face-to-face interview setting. These participants had been identified as gifted learners in a previous study (Henderson, 2001). The other eighteen participants completed a survey for this study.

The participants in this study were working in various professional jobs in a metropolitan city of approximately 180,000 people in the Northwest of the United States of America. They were females who had achieved successfully, and they were diverse in preferences, lifestyles, appearance, and careers. They ranged in age from 21 to 63 years.

The taped interview for each of the two gifted/talented participants lasted approximately seventy minutes, and the survey session for the eighteen particip was approximately thirty-five minutes. Open-ended questions were used to gath information about the participants' learning experiences, family influences, philos accomplishments, and their concepts about lifelong learning.

Results

The major findings in this study were specific patterns that repeated themselve throughout the data for the participants. Thirteen of the participants were educato teachers, and administrators. Seven of the participants worked in other professio Examples are law, government, and accounting. Their comments described their feelings about why they considered themselves to be lifelong learners. Eighteen participants stated explicitly and passionately that they were lifelong learners. Th wrote about their need and hunger to learn, that they were constantly in a learnin mode, and that, with the changing world, one must be proactive. They conversed about how they had overcome family problems, sickness, and depression to obta higher learning.

The transcribed data from the gifted and talented participants in the face-to-fac interview setting indicated that reading for achievement was a significant part of t daily activities during their early childhood. For example, one participant spoke candidly about her reading philosophy. She believed that learning is lifelong, an the key to anything is being able to read well, to have an understanding of what y read, and to have a love for it (Henderson, 2001).

In summary, all eighteen participants (90%) of the survey group indicated that t read to gain knowledge or to discover useful information, sixteen participants (80%) indicated a need to read to acquire personal enrichment, sixteen particip (80%) indicated that they needed to read to teach or guide others, and fifteen

participants (75%) indicated a need to read to invest in a future job.

Another major finding was in the motivational response category. The responses in this section were the comments the participants made about what motivated them to become lifelong learners. Some of the responses referred to self-motivation, being a seeker of knowledge, and having the need to be aware of what is current in education.

Comments from the participants that alluded to learner-managed learning were in the realm of how they always try to learn new things, how they were working to obtain a master's or doctor's degree in education, how it was their obligation, and how they had the desire to leave a legacy of standards for the family. A table of the responses to the survey follows.

Table 1

Lifelong Learners Response to Survey

Occupation	Lifelong Learner?	Motivation
1. Education Advocate	Most definitely	Seeker of Knowledge
2. Elementary School	I am a lifelong learner.	It is my obligation
3. High School Education Administrator	Yes! I enjoy reading.	Family
4. Teacher/Educator	Yes! I am an avid reader.	Urge to be knowledgeable
5. Teacher	Yes! I enjoy reading and taking courses.	A love of learning
6. Educator	Yes! I always try to learn new things.	I am self-motivated.
7. Speech Pathologist	Yes! I read for pleasure.	In my profession reading is vital.
8. Computer Operator	Yes! I always learn to be a better person.	Job advancement
9. Registered Nurse	Yes! I am a motivated driven person	Personal enrichment Help others gain new knowledge
10. Teacher	Yes! I am working on my masters.	I need to be aware of what is current in education.
11. Lawyer	Yes! I need and hunger to learn.	Life
12. Educator	Yes! I love to read	Need to be abreast of things around me...
13. Professional Worker Small Business	Yes! I am constantly in a learning mode.	The power of God Obtaining wisdom Having a sound mind
14. State Government	Yes! I read at least one book per month.	Eager to know as much as I can. Exercise my mind.
15. Collection Representative	Yes! Changing world.	Leaving a legacy of

		One must pro-act	standards for the family.
16.	Teacher	Yes! I believe you learn new things.	I want to better myself.
17.	Administrative Assistant	Yes! I read for myself.	Interested in learning as much as I can.
18.	Teacher	Yes! Working on doctor of education degree.	I enjoy learning; it's very rewarding

Discussion

The goal of this study was to investigate and analyze how learner-managed responsibility and motivation maintained and promoted a lifelong learning vision for some gifted and avid adult learners.. The results indicated how the career women were responsible to not only control their learning process, but also to determine the education process that is required for their growth and development. Long (1997) believed that through learner managed learning, individuals are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning process throughout life.

The results also indicated that the majority of the participants were driven to reach self-actualization. They had an ability to conceptualize, which is another key factor in the overall development of an individual. Further, the participants were motivated by the desire to achieve their goals by appealing to their inner drive. Maslow (1970) emphasized that the healthy person is motivated by growth motivations towards self-actualization rather than deficiency motivation.

Their comments about reading and motivation were very direct and positive. In addition, patterns in the data and admissions from a majority of the participants highlighted the power of the learner-managed learning concept in the learning process to maintain and accelerate a lifelong learning vision for career women.

Research on this topic should be ongoing in the area of the participants' attitude about lifelong learning as they increase in age.

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Lifelong Learning Survey

Questionnaire:

My occupation is _____.

1. **Do you consider yourself to be a lifelong learner? Explain.**

2. **What do you think motivates you to continue learning?**

3. **How often do you read a fiction or non-fiction book in its entirety?**

4. **Do you read in order to_____? (Please circle)**

   a. **gain knowledge or to discover useful information**
   b. **acquire personal enrichment**
   c. **teach or guide others**
   d. **invest in your future job**
   e. **obtain all of the above**

5. **Other comments:**

LIFELONG LEARNERS

/

Free Learners

\

Motivated Readers

(Self-directed)

/

Educators
Professional Workers
Writers
College students
Researchers
National Leaders
Ludic Readers
et al.

\

Learner Managed Learner

Gifted
Talented
Analytical
Drive

/

Learning Institutions

Conventional Educational Setting
(Colleges and Universities)
"Invisible University"
Long Distance Learning Institutions

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Rewards

Understanding self, others, the world
Gaining new knowledge
Improved job performance
Stress free
Book clubs
Personal enrichment

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